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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the nature of radicalism, proposes definitions and dimensions, and suggests the dynamics of radical thoughts and their interrelation with schools. A radical idea is one which is highly divergent from the normative values, behaviors, ideals or traditions of a culture at a point in time. This paper views radical ideas as occurring at either end of a right-left spectrum of social thought. While one might expect radical right and radical left ideas to be dichotomous, there are a number of areas of convergence. Because schools are a major agent of socialization, they are one of the primary foci of reform movements, both as agents and targets. Thus, the content of radical social ideas has a direct relation to the content present in schools. In terms of process, schools in an open society must be able to provide an intellectual setting in which conflicting ideas can be examined. This process implication of radical ideas for education assumes adequate academic freedom and intellectual prowess to engage students in these typically controversial topics. Unfortunately, the tradition of intellectual and academic freedom has not been well established in the public schools. Educators need to undertake the study of social radicalism and to provide students with opportunities for extensive investigation of radical social ideas. (Author/JLB)

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SOCIAL RADICALISM AS A FRAMEWORK FOR EDUCATION

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Although the term "radical" has a pejorative connotation in contemporary society, it is still true that radical ideas have moved societies to significant improvements as well as chaotic disasters. The notion of democracy as a governmental organization was radical at its inception, and is still a radical idea in some parts of the world. Worshipping one God, many Gods or no Gods have each been radical ideas at some time or place. The initial development of atomic weaponry was a radical departure from what had been conventional warfare. While one may argue about whether each of these ideas represents social improvement or deterioration, it remains that radical thoughts provide the basis for much social change. This, by no means, includes all or even a majority of radical thoughts nor does it include all examples of social change. But the current anti-intellectual trend in some areas of American society brands all radical ideas as evil and establishes blockades and censorship to prevent open discussion of them.

This paper examines the nature of radicalism, proposes definitions and dimensions, and suggests the dynamics of radical thoughts and their interrelation with schools. The method of study

employed is an analysis of literature about radicalism, including historical and social scientific treatises, formulation of a conceptual framework for the paper, and examination of a sample of radical literature about society and schools.

The definition of radicalism used in this paper incorporates time and space dimensions and involves a cultural dynamic. That is, a radical idea is one which is highly divergent from the normative values, behaviors, ideals or traditions of a culture at a point in time. Radicalism is a system of belief in one or more of these radical ideas. The time dimension figures in as one views ideas occurrin in a period - historical, present or future - and determines that the idea is or is not highly divergent from accepted mores of the time. Democracy as a governmental form has had periods of radicalness. Presumably, some prehistoric tribes about which we have only fragmentary knowledge provided for government by common consent. The development of monarchic forms of government became commonplace, during which democracy would have been considered radical. Certainly, representative democracy was a radical view during the Middle Ages. Now, a radical view in America could be support for a monarchy. A future social engineering government with technocracy as the power

is a radical idea now.[1]

This illustrates also the place dimension of radical thought. Monarchies, though the power base has changed, are still within mainstream thinking in many European countries. The actual abolition of formal royalty and the mass distribution of the wealth controlled by royal lineage in England would surely be a radical view there, while it is not such a radical idea in America unless one uses the analogy of royalty to the industrial-military complex. The illustration is to show the cultural framework for radicalism.

Writers have argued that America has a tradition of radicalism. Howard Mumford Jones traces radical men and ideas from the exploratory period forward. He calls the American Revolution radical and states that the twilight of America's reputation for radicalism may have occurred with Roosevelt's New Deal.[2] Staughton Lynd notes that the radical tradition in America comes from both English and American ideas and is centered on the relation of man to state.[3] T.B. Bottomore focuses on the differences in dissent patterns in Europe and America and provides examples of radical ideas existing according to location and cultural tradition.[4] Others have shown links between American life and radical thought.[5] Daniel Boorstin argues that radicalism has been displaced by "new barbarians" in America. His premise is that

real radicalism incorporates a search for meaning, a particular content that indicates its roots, and an affirmation of community interest in the same problems. These characteristics, Boorstin feels, are not present in modern American dissenters who search for power rather than significance.[6]

Although Jean François Revel's recent book, Without Marx or Jesus argues that the United States is the most likely country to undergo revolutionary change, and presents evidence that the change has begun, radicalism is not an American commodity.[7] Each society has some determinents of radicalism and they vary as societies vary. Neither are radical ideas a new phenomenon. As monogamy is a revolutionary idea to a polygamous or polyandrous society, so mass educatio at public expense was a radical thought in 17th century Europe. Radicalism, then, has both time and place dimensions. It is a relative concept that depends upon cultural mores, traditions and values for its definition. The essence of radicalism is its divergence from socially established norms of thought and behavior.

Radicalism, as a belief system, and radicals, as individuals proposing dramatic reforms or protesting heinous sins, are a force in modern societies. Among radicals there is often little agreement on ends or means, but on certain issues there appears to be convergence. The most commonly accepted notion is that of revolutionary

change. Despite the problems of labelling, this paper views radical ideas as occurring at either end of a right-left spectrum of social thought. That is, as Clinton Rossiter points out in Conservatism in America: The Thankless Persuasion, both ends of the spectrum express revolutionary views.[8] There is a body of literature which speaks of the radical right as well as the radical left.[9]

While one might expect radical right and radical left ideas to be dichotomous, it is interesting to note that there are a number of areas of convergence. Both appear to share a belief in individual liberties, though they might approach it quite differently. Accordingly, both fear highly centralized governments and government interference.[10] This is expressed through attacks on the current welfare system, income and other taxes, and some major governmental institutions. The schools represent obvious institutions of government, and, thus, are ready targets for both right wing and left wing radicals. Some argue that schools be abolished entirely while others recommend whole-scale reform. The distinctions between right and left radical ideas for schools lie in the reasons for and proposed results of revolutionary change.

The self-destruction of successful radical movements is another dynamic of this topic. The vast majority of radical ideas fail to become accepted in the larger society. It can be presumed that a

large number of revolutionary ideas do not attract a sufficient constituency to establish even fleeting visibility in the public eye. Other radical views gain adherents, but are not sustained and fall out of public awareness. Brief encounters with radical religious, sexual, economic, political, and educational proposals have filled newspapers and magazines since printing began. Most of these groups remain outside of the dominant societal value system or they fade away into oblivion. Some radical notions, for a variety of reasons, develop articulate and powerful supporters and become assimilated into the intellectual mainstream of a society. Christianity, male dominance, socialism, bureaucracy and kindergartens exemplify this trait. When an idea considered radical at one time and place becomes established in a society it loses its radical connotation and self-destroys as a radical movement.[11]

One of the few means available for the testing of radical ideas is the school. Because schools are a major agent of socialization, they are one of the primary foci of reform movements. Whether the social intent of such movements is toward elitism or massism, specialization or generalization, permissiveness or control, individuality or conformity or a variety of other social polarities, the schools provide an opportunity to prepare the new society or to resurrect the old. The radical viewpoint, right or left, sees this opportunity

to instill values in the young and to drastically alter society by major alteration in a dominant social institution. Vocal critics of education following World War II and continuing through the Sputnik panic included those in protest against what they perceived as the evils of progressive education. Many of the critics were in the social mainstream, advocating modest adjustments in curriculum and landling of students. Others proposed more extensive change in schools.[12]

More contemporary critics have cited the schools' failure to be adequately permissive; its dehumanization, and its high degree of conformity.[13] Some of these writers argue for moderate modification, while others want radical system change. Right wing proposals to eliminate governmental control of schools and compulsory education[14] are strikingly similar to left wing advocacy for the abolition of schools.[15] The reasons for destroying mass, compulsory education obviously differ, but the proposals are related to new concepts of individual liberty in society shared by radical right and left.

There are numerous implications for education, both as content and process. Radical social ideas often involve social institutions as reform agents or targets. Schools as a dominant socializing institution are widely available as means for constructing the potentia new society. Schools are also obvious targets of reform movements

since they represent the establishment and its attempts to inculcate selected cultural values. Thus, the content of radical social ideas has a direct relation to the content (form, structure, operation, orientation and knowledge) present in schools. In terms of process, the schools of an open society must be able to provide an intellectual setting in which conflicting ideas can be examined. Radical ideas are part of an open society and the schools are the obvious location for thorough inquiry into radical as well as more moderate viewpoints. This process implication of radical ideas for education assumes school staffs have adequate academic freedom and intellectual prowess to engage students in these typically controversial topics. It also assumes societal agreement that such issues be addresses.

Unfortunately, the tradition of intellectual and academic freedom that pervades higher education, though even that fluctuates in times of stress and among different institutions, has not been well established in the public schools. Rather, areas of controversy have more typically been exempt from adequate treatment in elementary and secondary schools.[16] This dismal history in public education is chronicled by Howard K. Beale[17] and Bessie Pierce[18] and given modern exposure in a recent publication.[19] Yet, there is a need to pursue open education as an essential condition for an open society, and this assumes the need to expose radical social ideas to students. The

intent is not to radicalize them, that can be done also by failure to permit discussion of contrary ideas, but to provide the open forum needed to test radical ideas by giving students the opportunity to consider, study, accept, reject or modify radical thoughts.

That social change happens is substantiated by a broad social scientific literature. This paper notes the existence of work on radicalism in America and suggests that radical social ideas have an impact on social change and on social institutions. Obviously, not all radical ideas are sound or acceptable or worthy of discussion, but some are. The schools as a socialization agent are both recipients of the impact radical ideas for social change and the means for appropriate consideration of those ideas. There is a societal need for educators to undertake the study of social radicalism and to provide students with the opportunity for extensive investigation of radical social ideas.

NOTES

[1]In particular see such works as George Orwell, 1984, New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1949;
Aldous Huxley, Brave New World, New York: Harper, 1932; B.F. Skinner, Walden Two, New York: Macmillan, 1948; and Beyond Freedom and Dignity, New York: Alfred Knofp, 1971; and Theodore Roszak, The Making of a Counter Culture, Garden City: Doubleday, 1969.

[2]Howard Mumford Jones, O Strange New World, New York: Viking Press, 1964.

[3]Staughton Lynd, Intellectual Origins of American Radicalism, New York: Pantheon Books, 1968.

[4]T. B. Bottomore, Critics of Society: Radical Thought in North America, New York: Pantheon Books, 1968.

[5]See Arthur Schlesinger, The American as Reformer, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950; Peter Schrag, "America's Other Radicals", Harpers Magazine, August 1970; David Bennett, Demagogues in the Depression: American Radicals and the Union Party 1932-1936, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1969; Irving Howe, The Radical Imagination, New York: New American Library, 1967; Christopher Lasch, The New Radicalism in America, New York: Alfred Knofp, 1965.

[6]Daniel Boorstin, The Decline of Radicalism: Reflections on America Today, New York: Random House, 1969.

[7]Jean Francois Revel, Without Marx or Jesus, Garden City: Doubleday, 1971.

[8]Clinton Rossiter, Conservatism in America: The Thankless Persuasion, New York: Vintage Books, 1962.

[9]See such works as Daniel Bell, ed., The Radical Right, Garden City: Anchor Books, 1963; Benjamin Epstein and Arnold Forster, The Radical Right, New York: Random House, 1967; and John A. Hamilton, "Year of the Radical Reactionary", New York Times, November 2, 1970, P. 47.

[10]See Stan Lehr and Louis Rossetta, Jr., "The New Right Credo-Libertarianism", New York Times Magazine, January 10, 1971; Jerome Tuccile, "A Split in the Right Wing", New York Times, January 28, 1971, p. 35; Paul Jacobs and Saul Landau, The New Radicals, New York: Random House, 1966; Philip Slater, The Pursuit of Loneliness, Boston: Beacon Press, 1970; Roszak, Counter Culture op. cit.; Arthur Waskow, Running Riot, New York: Herder and Herder, 1970.

[11]Jack L. Nelson, Kenneth Carlson and Thomas Linton, ed., Radical Ideas and the Schools, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972, Introduction.

[12]See Arthur Bestor, Educational Waste Lands, Urbana: Universit of Illinois Press, 1953; Hyman Rickover, Education and Freedom, New York: Dutton, 1959; James Koerner, ed., The Case for Basic Education, Boston: Little, Brown, 1959.

[13]See Edgar Z. Friedenberg, Coming of Age in America, New York: Random House, 1965; Jerry Avorn, Up Against the Ivy Wall, New York: Atheneum, 1969; Jonathan Kozol, Death at an Early Age, New York: Houghton-Mifflin, 1967; John Holt, How Children Fail, New York: Pitman, 1964.

[14]Medford Evans, "School Daze", in Nelson, Carlson, Linton, Radical Ideas and the Schools, op. cit.

[15]Ivan Illich, "The Alternative to Schooling", and Paul Goodman, "The Universal Trap", Ibid.

[16]Maurice Hunt and Lawrence Metcalf, Teaching High School Social Studies, New York: Harper and Row, 1968.

[17]Howard K. Beale, Are American Teachers Free?, New York: Scribners, 1936; and A History of Freedom of Teaching in American Schools, New York: Scribners, 1941.

[18]Bessie Pierce, Citizens Organizations and the Civic Training of Youth, New York: Scribners, 1933.

[19]Jack L. Nelson, "Nationalistic Education and the Free Man", Chapter 14 in Roy Fairfield, ed., Humanistic Frontiers of Education, Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1971.